

Undergraduate academic information literacy skills – exploring optimal training for the Internet and social media

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Introduction

- Academic IL – preparation for under-graduate and eventually post-graduate studies
 - Databases, OPACs, discovery systems, reference techniques, ethical information practices
 - Some use of the Internet and social media → scholarly practices
- Workplace and everyday life IL studies
 - Preference for using the Internet and human resources
 - Necessity of using Internet resources in workplace
- Problems with transfer of IL skills to workplace
 - Difference between academic and workplace contexts
 - Limited understanding of information behaviour in rapidly changing workplaces
- Workplace experiences and information practices of graduates point to the need for training in the appropriate use of the Internet and social media



Study of the transfer of academic IL skills to workplace – triggered a new question

How can workplace use of the Internet and social media be incorporated into academic IL training?

- Which workplace tasks require the use of the Internet and social media?
- How can such examples be included in academic IL training?




Methodology

- Qualitative data collected in 2018
- 23 graduates from the University of Pretoria who completed a compulsory credit-bearing IL course between 2006 and 2016
 - Represented a wide array of occupations e.g., lecturing and research, administration, web design, legal advice for occupational health, software design, audiology, actuarial accounting, management consulting, risk management, change management and veterinary science
- Critical incident interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes
 - A critical incident referred to an incident in the workplace where it was important to find and use information
- Practice theory – information practices
- Thematic analysis



Findings – opportunities for optimal academic training in the Internet and social media (1)

- Building social capital (searching for people / interacting with people)
 - Maintaining contact with national and international colleagues, clients, etc.
 - Identifying collaborators
 - Identifying experts, advisors, consultants
 - Making contact with people in industry & across different disciplines and stakeholders
 - Finding websites where like-minded people communicate e.g., StackOverflow
- Monitoring trends and developments in industry
 - E.g., using newsfeeds, Newsflash, PressReader, Finance24




Findings – opportunities for optimal academic training in the Internet and social media (2)

- Scouting / foraging for inspiration and nurturing creativity
 - E.g., resources such as Pinterest
- Personal information management
 - Finding available tools
 - Independent learning of how to use tools & advanced features
- Software skills development
 - New software relevant to workplace
 - Guidelines, training manuals, discussion groups
 - Independent learning of advanced software features e.g., of Excel, PowerPoint, Photoshop
 - How to install software




Findings – opportunities for optimal academic training in the Internet and social media (3)

- Extending knowledge base e.g., of a new standard
- Information sharing
 - Tools to use e.g., Dropbox, WeTransfer, STFTP
- Verification of factual information
- Finding support for proposals/ideas and verifying preferences
 - E.g., is a programme like SharePoint used in workplace?
- Orientation / training material for clients e.g., on new standards




Findings – opportunities for optimal academic training in the Internet and social media (4)

- Training material and skills e.g., when they need to offer training to clients and junior colleagues
- Background information e.g., when writing a paper, preparing a presentation
- Comparisons, e.g.,
 - Between products
 - Between textbook and most recent themes and developments



Findings – opportunities for optimal academic training in the Internet and social media (5)

- Verification of “new” terminology specific to workplace
- Examples, illustrations, case studies – e.g., for when working as a lecturer (academic workplace)
- Social media must be acknowledged as a core “tool” in some occupations e.g., journalism, market research
- Keeping a competitive edge, e.g.,
 - Comparing with other companies / related industries websites
 - Benchmarking
 - Identifying weaknesses, gaps
 - User-friendliness




Findings – opportunities for optimal academic training in the Internet and social media (6)

- Collecting information on products
- Dealing with changes in workplace – workload, responsibilities
 - Expanding skill sets – independent learning e.g., online courses
- Improvisation
- Identifying industry related platforms for sharing ideas, experiences and questions
- Identifying leaders in the industry (i.e., people searches)



Findings – opportunities for optimal academic training in the Internet and social media (7)

- Visualisation / presentation skills
- Determining what has been done and improving on it e.g., software features
- Experimenting with different kinds of “citation pearl” strategies to find keywords, search strings and information resources ... e.g., find information on how to implement a system for secure transfer of files; search a few sites and web pages to find the right words, then find guidelines, and implement the system. If an error message occurs the error message can be used to trigger further searches for information.



Findings – opportunities for optimal academic training in the Internet and social media (8)

- Preparing supporting documents and references to motivate choices and as support in documentation e.g., for source codes
- Finding best practices for an industry / organisational type and for drawing comparisons



Conclusion

It is clear that the Internet and social media are essential resources which should be acknowledged in academic IL training aimed at the transfer of IL skills as a life-long skill. These resources should be positioned as essential workplace tools, along with their value for academic study.

- It should not come to graduates as a surprise that the Internet and social media are actually valid and in fact, essential information resources and tools, in the workplace



Thank you for your time and attention

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Please join us for ISIC2020 – Information Seeking in Context – The Information Behaviour Conference next year in Pretoria. Brochures at the registration desk.